The Swapper and the King

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The Swapper and the King

by Mulberri

Summary

AU with some magic sprinkled over the main characters and their special abilities. Will and Hannibal switch bodies mid-season two, they are both keeping secrets, and the Mizumono crisis is averted.

Ortolans

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Artwork by the amazingly talented ash-and-starlight

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Will Graham was born with a special kind of curse: an empathy disorder. Others would call it a gift, but to Will, it meant that he had to resist forming any kind of human connection, or else risk losing himself. It was empathy so powerful, he could not meet the eyes of another without being swallowed whole by them.

He isn't entirely sure how long he's had the ability. The first time it happened, he was about eleven years old. A stray dog wandering the neighborhood, probably was a German Shepherd mix, but his father didn't deal with animals. Will had tried to sneak the dog into the backyard. It was skinny, with matted fur, and covered in fat ticks. The first thing he did was give the dog bowls with water and leftover spaghetti. As it ate and drank, Will had taken pliers and as gently as he could so as not to leave the heads embedded in the skin, removed each tick and crushed it. Then he washed the dog with dish soap under the hose, rinsed the blood and filth out of it's brown fur, and towel dried it.

"You alright there, Fang?" he said to the dog, and giggled when Fang covered his face in grateful, happy kisses.

He looked at the dog's brown eyes, felt his empathy envelop him, felt like a connection had quickly formed between their two souls. In a jarring blink, like as if his entire body were zapped by an electric fence, he found himself staring at blue eyes, vivid and familiar. At first, they were all he could see, and then he could feel the pressure of standing on his arms and legs, and scent hit him, an array of strong pungent smells and sweet, mouth-watering smells that he could not decipher. Now he saw the blue eyes, familiar from the mirror he looked into each morning, wide and staring at him from his own round young face. He saw his body crumple, landing on its hands and knees, his mouth wide open, struggling to keep upright. He wasn't lacking a body of his own, however. He could see the end of his snout, the bump of a dog's nose, and he looked down at a pair of brown paws. He yelped, and frantically tried to leap at his old body, grabbed its hand in his mouth, and his body wailed in terror. Their eyes met again, and he felt his entire being tumbling, tumbling, like off a cliff. He opened them again, and he was lying on his back. He lifted his hand, bloodied from a dog's bite, to his smooth human face, and breathed. Fang was already gone, taken off from his yard with tail between legs.

Will called it an empathy-induced mindswap, and it came as a result of getting to know the inside of someone else's head a little too much, and always involved direct eye contact. He does not know why, but this strange phenomenon seemed to happen more and more frequently as he aged into his teens, gaining more empathy as he grew older. He learned a few tricks to stay distant, such as maintaining a bristly temperament, and wearing sunglasses, which of course he had to substitute for eyeglasses when he took on jobs. He learned about his ability, such as when he is already swapped, he can't swap with anyone else but whoever has his original body. By sixteen, he began to learn to shut the door on his emotions, so to speak. This only caused him to become unstable, and his father, who of course had to find out about Will's undesirable gift the rough way, had to convince him to see a psychiatrist. It didn't do much for Will, or at least not in any way he would ever choose to admit. If he wanted to be honest with himself, it helped. Without a psychiatrist, it might have taken him well into his twenties before getting a hold over his "special curse" as he named it. His entire

youth was fraught with enough issues for one typical mortal human to deal with in a lifetime, he'd think, until adulthood hit him.

The last time that it happened was on the same day that he decided to quit his job as an officer in the field. It was an escalation with a man with a knife and a serious temper. The guy lodged his knife deep into the muscle of Will's shoulder, and while gripping the knife and leering maniacally not two inches away from his face, they swapped. He had felt the zapping shock, and loudly cursed at his carelessness. The pain of a bullet pierced him through his ribs, and he had frantically thrown his free arm around ex-Will's shoulders, still unwittingly gripping onto the knife that was now in his hand. He pressed his sweaty forehead against his old one, and fixedly stared into those manic blue eyes. "Those don't belong to you," he had whispered.

"Let go of him, now!" his partner was shouting. More bullets entered him, and he nearly experienced death. He came back into his own body just in time, sprawled out on his back bleeding from his wound, just before the other man died.

The permanent injury he sustained to his shoulder served as a reminder of real-world consequences of his empathy. It could have been much, much worse, he had realized while lying in the hospital after surgery. It could have ended with him dead in a body that wasn't his, and a deranged murderer free to wreak havoc in the body of a trusted officer.

Ever since that incident, Will has remained distant with people so it wouldn't happen again. He had quit, with the intention to never risk his body and reputation so thoroughly again. That is, until very recently, when Jack Crawford, head of FBI, called him back to the field to catch the Chesapeake Ripper. It all changed after he encountered Garret Jacob Hobbs, the cannibalistic murderer, and took his life. No, the events that led him to encounter Hobbs were manipulated by another, the cunning predator, Hannibal Lecter. Will's inner world and outer universe were destined to change the moment Hannibal took an interest in him.

It was Will's goal to see that Hannibal was utterly changed as he was, in turn, and by no other hand than his own. They were connected by death, and living their truths through each other. This connection is why Will's goal shifted from wanting to wanting Hannibal dead, to wanting Hannibal caught. Although, now…maybe not even that. He wanted Hannibal, somehow, some way.

He sits with Hannibal now over wine and candles. The dimly-lit table is adorned with a variety of flowers and animal bones, and the priceless painting of 'Leda and the Swan' hangs on the blue wall beside them. Such an intimate setting, the perfect setting for their relationship at this point. The heavy darkness of the room fits them as well, and Will, always appreciative of metaphor, had no complaint with the lack of visibility. Except…the candle light made Hannibal's face a focal point, and Will kept finding himself meeting his eyes, despite the risk. The risk had only been getting worse, lately.

At their previous dinner, he had felt them blur. There was no sharp physical shock like usual, instead it felt more like a vibration, and he wondered for a moment whether he imagined having a heightened sense of smell before he opened his eyes and found that Hannibal still sat before him.

He knew they had almost swapped, perhaps spared when they had closed their eyes in that moment. It was one of the reasons he lie awake in bed that night. He felt unsettled remembering it because there had been nothing unsettling about it when it had happened. He had already gotten too close, yet here he was getting closer and closer.

Tonight doesn't seem to have any sort of break in that gravity. "Your spoken desire to save lives mingles with your secret desire to take them," Hannibal is quietly telling him, the candlelight silhouetting his sharper features, granting him a skull-like appearance.

Will usually struggles against the notion that he, the empath, has an empathizer. In moments like these with Hannibal, it is a futile struggle, but he tries. "You have latched yourself onto that secret. Are you only interested in me because I desire it?"

Will came here with the intention to play manipulator, but he cannot help himself from falling ever further into their dark connection, a risk that he has been well aware of, even before he had learned of Hannibal's true identity.

"That's part of it," Hannibal says.

"In that case, why not mark up another? One who has already acted upon their dark impulses.

"Because I am equally attached to your desire to save lives."

"Hm," Will considered. "You seek another to play god alongside. Do you not simply wish to tarnish that which has been untarnished?"

"You're not untarnished. You have already acted upon your dark impulses."

"Well, okay, but why not choose someone like Randall Tier? That is, if he hadn't become a dish."
"Courtesy of you. Thank you again for that, by the way. He was delicious."

Will, even though used to the cannibal jokes, finds himself forcing a straight face, but continues on past Hannibal as if he hadn't spoken. "Could it simply be that I bested him in your little test? If he'd won and I had lost, he'd be the one sitting in this chair, with me long-past digested."

"Truth is, Will, I feel a deep attachment to you not only because of your inherent violence, but because of your empathy."

"My inherent violence would allow me to understand you, compound that with my empathy which allows me to better understand you. You want to be understood, yet you've made no prior efforts for friendship to my knowledge."

"That is true. It's not often a potential friendship comes along, especially one where I could be understood."

"I don't know, it seems like you and Tobias Budge could have hit it off."

"He isn't you."

Will almost asks why he thinks he should be friends with him, but he knows Hannibal's answers are never 'should', but 'could'. Hannibal has a personal desire for Will's friendship, and Will fears asking what it is. He only needs to know his own answer as to why he should or should not be friends with Hannibal. He squeezes his eyes shut, wishing he could figure it out. Even now, they are somehow beyond friends, beyond lovers.

"Why me? Can you give me an answer, please?" Will almost forgets to not to meet his gaze, as badly as he wants to.

Still, Hannibal decides to give. “If I’m to be entirely honest? Because you want to protect those who are precious to you. You value attachment, and you are capable of mercy and good.”

Will hums in surprise. “That isn’t the sort of answer I expected.”

“What kind of answer did you expect?”

“I think I expected another line about my potential…for murder.”

“I didn’t expect that response.” Hannibal really wants to make eye contact.

“What response of mine were you hoping to hear?” Will says, staring down at his scarred knuckles.

“I expected something along the lines of, how a monster like me would be as far from concepts like mercy and good as could possibly be, and that you could not fathom why I would have any interest in them.”

“That’s an oddly specific expectation.”

“I confess, I fear you may think it is true.”

Will chose not to respond to that odd statement. Maybe he’d believe it if he saw it. “Well…we’re often interested in those things that can’t be reached. Yet, in your case….” He took a sip of wine.

Hannibal didn’t press further. He seemed rather satisfied. So Will decides to do a bit more pressing, continuing the direct route.

“Why are you interested in mercy and good?”

“Well, maybe I’ll tell you someday.”

“I’ll hold you to that promise,” Will mutters into his wine glass.

Hannibal suddenly breaks out in a true smile, and Will cannot help but reciprocate. The masks are off, Hannibal thinks. My mask is slipping, Will knows. For several more minutes, they sit together and enjoy the last of their wine glasses in silent companionship. Hannibal keeps looking at him, and Will wants to kick himself for liking it.

Will quietly thinks he may already be a lost cause to Jack’s justice. When Will had previously told Hannibal that he no longer cared to abide by the lines society set for the distinction between good and evil, he meant it. He was fueled solely by a desire to put this man away in a box, this man who had taken Abigail from him, so that he could have some peace of mind. Yet, this man has freed him from all constraints that society, his upbringing, that Jack, and his own morality has placed upon himself. What a scary and lonely existence, he thinks, and without Hannibal, he would have no desire for such freedom.

Hannibal presents their meal. Rare ortolans, endangered birds that symbolize debauched and cruel pleasure. The clashing between Will’s brain and heart rages as he listens to Hannibal explain the customary eating of ortolans. If not for Abigail, his internal battle would already have a conclusion. He could not forgive him, not until he has taken something equally as important from Hannibal, something equally loved.

Holding an ortolan in his hand and seeing that Hannibal was doing the same, the symbolism of the act hits him. Others might think that Hannibal's metaphors, monologues, and obscure references were highly pretentious, and while they were, Will was sadly a sucker for them. He will miss them when he's gone, he thinks. And, if this might be the last time he ever dines with Hannibal, he will not look away.

If Jack is like God, and views things as 'good' versus 'evil', Will thinks, then Hannibal is like Lucifer. He believes in following one's true nature and indulging in pleasures that make one feel good, not excluding those which are debauched and cruel. Will has turned his back on both Jack and Hannibal, suspending himself in a state of constant flux, all for his own pleasure in the presence of each person. Now, with no further hesitation, Will gives himself fully to Hannibal.

Will looks straight at Hannibal, and their eyes lock intensely as they slowly and purposefully mirror the other. Their hands lift the ortolans to their lips. As fast as he could have expected it, Will starts to get the feeling that they are being gravitationally pulled, like lonely planets in the deep dark of space caught by each other. In this moment each lives for the other, every deep breath, every flicker of emotion, every thought, taken away by the other to own. This moment of pure empathy, for the first time in Will's experience, is directed both ways at once.

They place the ortolans upon their tongues, relishing the sharp pain and taste of blood as the pointed bones cut them up. Simultaneously, they close their eyes, letting the blood and pain wash over them, through each other. They swallow their silent vows to keep within their bodies. Forever, Will tells himself in that moment, no matter what may befall them.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so glad to be a part of Murder Husbands Big Bang 2018!
I signed up in order to motivate myself to write something. Looks like it worked!

I hope you enjoy the story! :)

Swapped

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There had always been some kind of mental dissonance and a brief yet powerful shockwave across his skin when it happened, which is why this time Will doesn't register it at first.

In one moment, he has lost himself in Hannibal's eyes, and before he knows it, he sees them staring at him from his own face. Except, his eyes aren't normal. They are strikingly gold, and glitter like a dragon's treasure. The first thought Will has upon seeing them is a memory of the time he went to the local zoo many years ago. Even now, he remembers the feeling of awe and fear when he peered into the lion's pen. He was probably eight years old, years before he had discovered his ability, and so he had foolishly, fearlessly looked. Those lion's eyes were his first encounter with a natural killer, a predator of humans. Those piercing orbs belonging to a creature that, even behind bars, was completely assured of its own superiority above him. He was nothing but prey, more likely a mere toy, to such a royal creature.

At this moment, Will stares at those same exact eyes. Large shining discs with unsettling black holes for pupils, sucking him in. Calm and powerfully steady, with the built-up potential energy of a hurricane ready to release itself while their focused object remains too hypnotized to react. The exact same feelings of awe and mortal fear associated with those eyes when he first saw them return to him now.

The lion's eyes blinks once, and in the split second of broken eye contact, the metaphysical moment passes, so it would seem, and all becomes physical again. Will gulps for breath, not realizing he hadn't been breathing, and notices that every hair on his neck was up. He shivers again, realizing that he is currently inhabiting Hannibal's body, and awaits Hannibal's reaction.

For a few moments, they blink their eyes at each other and marvel at the magic of their moment. Will can't say whether or not he's surprised or disappointed, but simultaneously losing and gaining a body doesn't seem to bother Hannibal all that much. It looks like he's thinking about standing out of his chair, and his mouth is open, his eyes wide, but in the end he remains seated. Will is used to the screaming and disoriented collapsing that this usually instigates in normal people, so he can at least appreciate this further proof that Hannibal is far from normal. Wishing to dismiss his attention from the fact that tiny detail seems annoyingly important to him, Will gives his head a shake. Hannibal addresses Will in a breathless voice.

"Will?"

"Yes, Hannibal?"

"I…I believe I might have just had a little out of body experience."

Will quickly presses his napkin to his mouth to hold back a laugh. Hannibal's testing to see whether this is a shared experience or an individual hallucination.

He finishes off his second glass of wine and comments in as lighthearted a voice as he can manage, "I felt something similar."

Hannibal hums, and after a few second's hesitation, responds, "…just to be clear, you are not being metaphorical, are you?"

Will, remembering all too well his own torment when lost between reality and dreams, decides to indulge himself in this single chance at revenge. "Um, sorry, but what are you referring to again?"

"I'm sorry, Will, but…I seem to be having a moment." Touching his, Will's, face in awe, Hannibal says in amazement, "this is exquisite". Will sits still as a statue and watches while Hannibal caresses over his jaw and ears. Will starts going blank when he sees Hannibal slowly lift up his other hand and press his fingers against his lips, which he opens slightly, feeling their soft shape. Will suddenly has a desire to feel Hannibal's face, too, and his hand twitches, but he stops himself.

An alert that sometimes beeps in his mind is now blaring at him that Hannibal may have more feelings for him beyond platonic ones. He is hit by a hyper mixture of apprehension and giddiness along with the unbidden question of whether Hannibal would be the type to get off on the swapped body of an attractive person. Who wouldn't, though? Hating himself and his burning face, he decides that's enough of that.

Well, there's a problem. He can't switch back. He's doing what has always worked, staring at Hannibal's, or his, face and desiring it back. They aren't switching back, and Hannibal looks like he's on the verge of making out with himself.

"Hey, uh, why are you touching your face?!" Will blurts out in a frantic attempt to shock him out of whatever mindset he could possibly be in right now.

Hannibal looks at Will, confused at first, and then his mouth twitches as though caught between annoyance and amusement. "You really do constantly find ways to amaze me," he states.

Will raises his eyebrows in mock surprise, but is nevertheless impressed.

"The wounds in my mouth from the ortolan bones. They are rearranged. A sudden hallucination where all my senses, save one specific discrepancy, are perfectly in order would be very unlikely." Sensing that Will was about to continue his bluff of ignorance, Hannibal said with a strict tone, "I promised to no longer lie to you Will, and having to endure yours is a poor motivation for me to keep up my promise."

"Okay, fair. But, why did you think a hallucination is less likely than this?"

"We spend all our lives hiding who we truly are. I sensed that the river of your unusual superhuman empathy ran deeper than it seemed. To someone witness to some of this world's mysteries and fantasies, it makes some sense. Now," he turns to Will, "how long until the effects wear off?"

Hannibal, who has been maintaining his composure unbelievably well for someone who literally just lost his body, watches Will guardedly after dinner. "I would invite you to stay, but I'm sure you have your own things to wrap up back home, at least for now. Shall I call Jack or Alana for you?" Of course he's making the insinuation of having 'things' to wrap up. Hannibal suddenly adds in a slightly raised voice, "I wouldn't want you to feel haunted by shadows for too long tonight."

The sudden change of his stance might have flown past Will's attention if not compounded by the strange feeling of being watched. Will quickly glances at the stairway - empty, of course - and

back. “Haunted, no,” he says hurriedly. Although, he knew Hannibal was right. They couldn’t simply drop their own lives and responsibilities in order to pass as each other. Could they? He has dogs, Hannibal has patients. Now was their chance, late at night, when they could not be stopped and questioned by any familiar faces.

Hannibal’s face is carefully devoid of emotion. “You wish to stay?”

“We just…Hannibal, it’s late, and we just ate a person together. We just switched bodies, I mean… I’d rather not see their faces right now. In any case, what would they say if they found ‘you’ in my house?” I want this time to last, he thinks to himself.

Hannibal purses his lips and nods once. “It’s settled then? I’ll go check that a guest room is ready for company.”

He makes to walk towards the stairs, but pauses.

“Hannibal?” Will asks.

Hannibal turns to him. “You know, we could just leave tonight. Drop everything, spare everyone. Feed your dogs, leave a note. You do not know when or if we will ever get our own bodies and lives back.”

Will’s heart hammered and he was at a loss for words. He felt frozen, yet warmed.

“I’d have asked you anyways, but…this night seems to be an ideal time to ask.”

“Listen, I’m pretty tired. If we’re not switched back by tomorrow, maybe…maybe.” Will sat and stretched back on the couch. “This night has been a lot to digest.”

Hannibal smiles. “Indeed it has, and yet I’d choose no other company for it.”

As Will’s heart flutters against his ribs and his lashes flutter closed, Hannibal quickly heads up the stairs to have a few words with one of the rooms.

When Hannibal comes back down, he finds Will sleeping on the couch. He waves in Will’s face, calls his name softly once, and when he only gets a muffled sound in response, puts a blanket over him. Then he beckons and a girl emerges from the shadows behind him and stares with wide eyes at the slumbering body she normally associated with Hannibal. “Shh,” he is telling her. “We must keep our surprise.” She trails Hannibal towards the front door.

“Just remember the plan we made in the event that our house might be searched. This is a little bit different from that, but I know you can do it.”

“I’ve driven, or tried to drive my father’s car, a couple of times.“

“Illegally?“ he asks. She smiles, and he pats her head. “Attagirl.”

“I understand the directions at least, if not all the controls of the car.” She holds a piece of paper with a hand drawn map and directions. “So, are you sure this isn’t some elaborate prank, like when soldiers disguise themselves to surprise their kids?”

Hannibal huffed. “That wouldn’t be a bad idea. But, our family reunion isn’t today. It will come soon enough.”

“So,” she says, “I’ll be waiting for you and Will.” She leaves, shutting the door behind herself.

Will is hurtling alone in an infinite black hole. He has been falling and falling with no concept of time, but he’s sure it has been long enough for the universe to have slowed and for time to no longer exist. He is numb and blank as a corpse, for what else could one become if they existed as a floating consciousness in endless, timeless nothingness? Suddenly, there is another body, and he feels a feeling. It’s been too long to recognize the difference between feelings. He only knows that he feels something. Suddenly, the black hole yawns open inside his own head, and he feels like he belongs there with this other body. For some reason, he knows that he shares a desire with them. The desire to wreak havoc on the universe, hand in hand, completely alone but for each other. The world he was originally born into materializes around them, and he wakes out of his coma with a shout. He remembers who he has become.

Will heads upstairs, and on the way to Hannibal’s bedroom, he pauses beside a mirror in the hall. Hannibal’s face stares back at him, comically expressive. He notices that there are bags under his eyes. At least there is one similarity this body shares with his original one, if not a very ideal look. It’s odd when he thinks about it. He’s never seen Hannibal looking tired before, despite all the evidence pointing to him not taking more than an hour of sleep per day. He makes a couple more weird faces that he’s sure he wouldn’t catch Hannibal dead making himself, before moving on.

Hannibal stirs a little, just his breath and eyes. He lies immobile for the longest time in some weird kind of shock, like a cat that has been dressed up. Oh, that’s right. He’s wearing Will’s skin and clothes. As he lies there, he hears his door creak open and sits up to greet his visitor.

“Good morning, Will. Did you sleep well?”

“Oh, you know,” Will says. His head still feels a bit dizzy from the crazy dreams.

“Strange morning,” Hannibal says, stroking his bearded chin. Will almost feels compelled to tell him to stop it, but finds himself laughing instead, and bravely decides to sit on the edge of the bed.

“Yeah. I don’t even want to think about how the rest of the day might go.”

Within an arm’s length, it only felt natural to reach out their hands and touch their fingers together. Then, Hannibal touches his-Will’s face. Will holds still, gulping, and once again refrains from compulsively mimicking Hannibal’s deliberate gesture.

Hannibal, who seems to be off in a strange place in his mind that is unknown and momentarily lost to even himself, asks, “would you like some coffee?”

“I think it would be to our mutual benefit if we could keep an eye on each other. That is my body you have there. I’d like to keep an eye on myself to make sure I don’t get into any trouble. And, uh, I doubt you are as detached from yours as to allow me to do whatever I like in it. ”

“They are the vessels in which we were born into this world. Can’t argue against their value.”

God, he’s so weird. Will thinks. Barely human.

Seeing his expression, Hannibal says, “You are still you, and I am still me. That is what I personally argue is the most important thing.”

“I don’t disagree. I was just thinking…forgive me, but from my perspective, you don’t view anything like a normal mortal human being.”

“I don’t disagree,” Hannibal said, copying Will’s line in a most genuine way.

They sit for a moment quietly sipping their coffee, then Hannibal says “anyways, once we've had a bit of time to relax into this new situation, we can start thinking about what we will do about it, assuming we don‘t change back before then.” Will nodded his agreement.

“God,” Will sighs after breakfast and coffee. “Thankfully I don’t have class today. What will I do if Jack calls me, though? Or, calls you.”

“Feel free to speak on my behalf to help persuade him that you aren’t fit for work.”

“Gee, thanks,” Will mutters.

“In related news, I have a couple of appointments this evening. It‘s too late to cancel.”

Will has to swallow sudden mounting nervousness. There isn’t going to be a resting period. They have to deal with this now.

“How about, fake an accident or something? I once got excused from teaching for two weeks after getting into a car crash. Not deliberately, of course.”

Hannibal knows his car is gone. That worked out pretty well for him. He says, “I’ll see what I can do.” He gets up and leaves the room, and Will lies there barely more than twenty seconds before his skin starts crawling and he thinks of following Hannibal to keep his body in sight.

However, Hannibal returns a few seconds later, and exclaims dramatically, “how convenient! There has never been a more well-timed instance of having your car stolen.”

“You got rid of it that fast?”

Hannibal looks at him with a smile, “no, I mean someone else has already taken it.”

“No way,” Will says, laughing despite his discomforting worry. “That is uncanny.”

“The perfect word to sum up the last twelve hours. Unfortunately, a missing car won’t excuse us from the appointments.”

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal's sense of smell stays with him through the swap because his special abilities are linked to him spiritually, just as Will's are to him.

Also, Will is the only one who can see Hannibal's odd eyes. They're a result of his carefully constructed human mask slipping a little during the bodyswap.

Go Away, Jack!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal and Will spend the morning putting their heads together to figure out the best way they might get through this. Hannibal begrudgingly takes the simple route of faking sickness, and is able to reschedule all of his appointments. Both agree that keeping their switch a secret long enough to undo it would be in their best interests. They end up agreeing to stay at their own houses and taking on each other's roles for the time being.

Under Hannibal's direction, Will calls each of Hannibal's patients to explain the car theft situation. Will finds it odd at first that Hannibal doesn't want to report it. Hannibal deflects with, "I can find it on my own later."

"It doesn't have any leftover bodies in it, does it?"

"I keep it very tidy. But, I guess metaphorically…it depends on what you mean."

"Okaaay."

Will chalks it up to the likelihood that it hasn't yet been scoured of evidence from Hannibal's extracurricular activities. Within a couple of hours, they are able to formulate a variety of different excuses, a basic plan for at least the next day, and written instructions and tips for dealing with Hannibal's many acquaintances and patients, and Will's many dogs.

At noon, Hannibal manages to entice Will to come down for lunch. In the afternoon, Will finally gives in to his bladder and manages to get through business without feeling like a peeping Tom. Unfortunately, afterimages of an uncut penis continue to flash in his head throughout the day. It's made worse when Hannibal asks him permission before going himself. Will's cheeks burn and he nods, but he just had to go and let Will know exactly when he was going to be checking out his junk.

Definitely not the first time, Will wonders whether Hannibal might possibly harbor any sexual feelings towards him. Regardless of the answer to that particular question, he is thankful that despite Hannibal's lack of decency in so many areas, he is at least decent in some. He once again roughly shoves these intrusive thoughts back into the recesses of his mind.

Earlier this week, Will was dead-set on capturing Hannibal. He isn't going to give up the struggle just because he now literally lives in Hannibal's body. However, it's been a long morning, and he's content with joining Hannibal in at least this. After all, it's for their mutual benefit. Will is in the body of the Chesapeake Ripper, and if he does anything to incriminate his old body, they could switch back with the wrong man once again in prison. Either they both win, or they both lose. He begins to formulate a cautious plan nonetheless, for if they switch back, Hannibal will once again be fair game, and he won't miss the opportunity to ensure his upper hand.

"I hope you don't mind, but there is some business I should attend to," Hannibal tells him.
Will, who has been describing on paper the appearances of his dogs beneath their underlined matching names, freezes and looks up. He'd known they would have to separate sooner or later.

“What kind of business?” Will asks, features as blank and level as though Hannibal were back in his own body.

“The kind of business that someone unused to having guests might need to do around the house to prepare for said guest’s arrival.”

“Hiding all your incriminating evidence?” Hannibal blinks once. “As long as you’re not out murdering while wearing my body. Hopefully you’ll ask me for permission before that, too.”

“Of course, Will. And I hope that you ask my permission before putting food in my body that I would not normally eat. Under normal circumstances, I detest micromanagement of any sort, but you know how terribly important this is to me.”

Hannibal eagerly watches Will’s newly obtained face for any hint of backtracking on this deal to keep each other on tightly wound leashes. With all the hours he has spent at the mirror, practicing his person-suit, he’d be able to easily read his own face. “Deal,“ Will says after a consternated pause. For now, Hannibal is willing to put a pause on his murder sprees in order to find his footing in this new game. He may actively encourage their leashes to tangle so tightly that it becomes suffocating to them both, until one of them has to give slack to save both of their existences. Hannibal has no problem with being wrapped up in Will. Can Will last until the end while wrapped up in Hannibal?

Loud, incessant hammering on Will’s front door wakes him from sleep. Will groggily gets up out of his bed, noting that he is indeed still in Hannibal’s body. He accidentally brushes his chest hair with his wrist, and feeling indecent, actually grabs his robe and throws it on. He had originally gotten into bed fully clothed in pajamas, but even in a new body, his sweaty dreams wouldn’t leave him alone. He had peeled out of his clothes down to his boxers in the middle of the night, kicking them into a pile at the end of his bed, where they are now lost in the folds of the crumpled blanket.

His dogs are whining and pacing to the window and back. He hears Jack’s booming voice hollering, “WILL?”

“Fuck,” he mutters, and despite the situation, thrills at hearing a swear word in Hannibal’s voice. He makes a mental note to have fun with that later, if he manages to survive until the next peaceful moment.

For now, he scrambles for the box of notes they made yesterday, trying to find the one Hannibal wrote in the case that Jack should call on him in the morning. He knew he should have spent more time trying to remember them all, but he had fallen asleep before reading them. He spills the pile; there are like a hundred different notes here with various circumstances. He thinks he’s found it a couple of times, but it’s actually outlining what to do if Jack finds Will at Hannibal’s house, or if Jack calls Hannibal….

“Oh shit,” Will says, too panicked to enjoy the uncouth word this time. He grabbed the wrong pile of notes. He thought Hannibal had written their names switched, just like their bodies, and now Will could face palm himself into oblivion. He really should have read them, like Hannibal thought he was doing, when really he had become fixated with staring at the veins on his fair hands as he flexed the fingers.

Having no idea how he should react as a psychiatrist staying in his patient's home, in a state of dishevelment and undress no less, he simply crouches behind his large stuffed chair and waits Jack out. No sooner had Will hidden than Jack's large face appears at his window, peering in at his messy blankets. He has to leave sooner or later, Will thinks, shifting himself to make extra sure that he is completely out of view. He needs to call Hannibal right now, because he knows that that's who Jack is most likely to call first. Will, not daring to peek around the couch for fear of being seen, hears Jack's shoes crunch away from the front window to the side of the house.

Will races to where Hannibal's cell phone sits on his bedside table, grabs it with panicking hands, and dives back behind his couch again just as Jack's face appears in another window. Although Hannibal has like three hundred contacts on it, thankfully Will's name is saved as a "special contact" near the top with only a couple of other names, like "Jack" and someone called "Franklyn". Will remembers that was the same name of the patient killed by Tobias Budge; he must have been a favorite of Hannibal's. As Jack taps a few times on the window, Will finds his own name immediately, presses the call button, and hears it ring. He realizes he's been holding his breath for ten whole seconds when he hears Hannibal pick up on the other end.

"Hello?" he hears his voice say brightly.

Without greeting, Will quickly says in too-loud a voice, "I need to get out of here, it's Jack! I grabbed the wrong pile of cards, and I-" Suddenly the phone he is holding to his ear begins blinking and he sees that Jack is calling. "Jack just came to my door, now he's calling your phone, I just woke up and can't handle this right , I have no idea what to do. Please get him off my back!"

"I'll see what I can do," Hannibal says. "Don't answer him. I'll see you in a bit." He hangs up.

Will sits and waits behind the couch, the dogs whining at him. 'Shoo' he gestures at them, worried that Jack will notice their attention fixed curiously behind the couch. Traitors, he thinks, they let a cannibal plant evidence in his house, now they're trying to sell him out to his overbearing boss.

Finally, after ages, Will hears Jack's vehicle start up and leave. Hopefully Hannibal came up with a good excuse for him, and presses his name again, waiting as it dials. "Fuck, shit, damn," Will says, a few times over. "Ass." He feels a blush and figures that's enough of that. He sits up when Hannibal answers.

"He said he needs to speak to you in person. Said he was worried when neither you nor I answered."

"Why didn't you answer when he called? I assume he called my phone before coming to my house?"

"Yeah, I must not have been in the room when it rang. I've been pretty occupied."

"Well, why wouldn't you be?" Will asks suspiciously. "I'm gonna come over right after I get dressed." Will peeks into the bag of spare clothes Hannibal packed for him; all three-piece suits, of course. He sighs in despair. "I asked for casual clothes."

"Those are my casual clothes."

Will doesn't bother responding to that. "When's Jack want to see me?"

“This evening at eight. He says it’s private talk, as in he won’t say anything about it over the phone. He seems worried about your safety.”

Will feels a chill freeze him; Hannibal is going to find out about his and Jack’s plan to lure him out and catch him. “It’s, uh,” he tries to unfreeze, “probably about my mental health, again. He’s probably noticed that I’ve been a bit different, what with all the ‘hunting’ trips I’ve been having, you know?”

“We have our next session coming up. We can talk about it more then.”

“We’re still keeping them?”

“Of course, you have lost your mind after all. We both have. They just flew away from our bodies completely.”

“Alright, alright. Enough.” Will can’t seem to resist finding Hannibal’s terrible jokes amusing.

“Well, what do you suggest we do about Jack, then?” Hannibal asks. “If the subject is your mental health, we have three options. I could go alone, but I have to admit I don’t know how you behave when one on one with Jack, your mannerisms or tone. You could go as me and talk to him as your own psychiatrist.“ He pauses for a deliberately long moment. “Or we go see him together, which is the choice I’d choose.”

“We go together then,” Will says, knowing that causing a rise in suspicion would do him no favors.

Will spends about half an hour in the bathroom trying to freshen up. He washes his face, where he finally gives in to his insistent desire to run his hands over his high cheekbones. Once he starts, he’s unable to stop, running his soapy hand over his cheeks, and over the fair ridge of his nose, his plush lips and chin. Fascinating, wearing the face of this man, not only the familiar face of his friend, but the face of a killer. This face has been the last face seen by countless victims. Will is not sure which version of this face is more fascinating to him, and time slips away from him as he tries to express emotions in the mirror with it. Almost thirty minutes later, Will finally tears himself away from the mirror, somewhat frightened by how quickly time had flown.

He hurriedly dresses in a nice gray three-piece suit, combs his hair but doesn’t waste time putting any product in it, loops his tie lazily around his neck, and puts on shoes. Will arrives at Hannibal’s house and knocks at the door. Hannibal doesn’t answer, so Will calls him by pressing his own name on the phone.

“Hello, Will?” Hannibal answers, sounding slightly winded.

“I’m at the door,” Will says, all kinds of questions immediately flying out of the closed doors in his head. “What are you doing?”

“Housework.”

“Housework?”

“Be right there.”

Within seconds, Will’s old body stands in the entrance, inviting him inside. Will walks in, and tries not to gawk. Hannibal has Will’s old body dressed in a fitted blue three-piece suit and cream tie.

His hygiene is impeccable, his hair combed with not a strand out of place. His beard remains, but trimmed more neatly than he's ever seen it. However, he couldn't hide the fact that he hadn't rolled his sleeves back down all the way before clearly throwing the vest on over it in a hurry.

"Why, such a suspicious air about you, Will. I've only been cleaning up the place for your stay."

"Hmm. You are quite a suspicious character, you have to admit."

"Can't argue with that. Would you like some breakfast? Sausage and eggs."

Will had a feeling things would go like this. "You've got your car back, I've noticed. Ever file a report?"

"Nah. I drove around in a spare and found it down the street. One of those strange instances where the thief ditches the car immediately after stealing it. It's happened before to a few neighbors."

"What luck. So, is it car-thief sausage day?"

"Right, sausages. Almost forgot, they're still on the stove."

Instead of answering his actual question, Hannibal hurries off to the kitchen to start putting the food on plates for them, and Will rolls his eyes and follows.

It turns out Will hadn't had much to be worrying about. Aside from the questionable source of the sausage, Will almost thinks Hannibal might actually be trying to behave himself. Of course, when he said he was cleaning up for a visit, what he really meant was that he was hiding all of his incriminating shit. There were boxes and garbage bags stacked about, and Will noticed as he walked around that they were concentrated near the stairs that led down to the basement, which was emanating a stench of heavy cleaning chemicals.

Will sits on the stool at the counter and hungrily accepts the breakfast without any further questions on their origin, and instead redirects his questions towards the housework.

"Cleaning out your basement, huh?"

Hannibal wipes off the stove and counter-tops with a rag, and sits down beside Will. He drops all pretenses, and Will almost drops his fork.

"It has to be done. We are in different bodies now, for who knows how long. It could be forever. It's like moving to a new house; clean up the old one, transfer the vital essentials into the new one, and start life over. If I was ever troubled about my own trust for you, I have decided to put those troubles on the back-burner. I am quite confident that we are in everything together now. Even if we change back, we have experienced each other in mind and body. It's almost like marriage, and if we separate…."

"Divorce," Will says, understanding. Will had been working on plans for planting unequivocal evidence against Hannibal which would be unearthed in the case that they switched back. These formless plans begin falling completely apart as he listens to Hannibal openly talk about it. He's right. Would the only way to end this be in a bloodbath? There is no way Hannibal would let Will go without one, is there? And would Will be able to completely sever his mind from Hannibal's without one? Violence is what they both understand; Will has the job he does because of his ability to understand violence.

“I,” Will begins. “I don’t think I want that. We can’t even begin to know what that would entail. I mean, the only way a ‘divorce’ could happen between us is if one of us dies, right?” Will regrets saying it out loud. He feels tense, as if he was setting a bear trap beneath the table. Hannibal is sitting in quiet stillness, possibly contemplating the same thing.

“Hannibal,” Will says, and Hannibal looks up at him. “Will it come to that?”

“Hard to say for sure,” Hannibal responds honestly, “but I don’t think so. I am fond of you.”

Will simply nods. He knows Hannibal has been sincere about becoming his friend, and having him join him as a partner-in-crime.

“Hard to say,” he repeats.

“Well, if all goes well, there will be no need to worry about a last resort.”

“How would a last resort be avoided?”
“We live on, as usual,” Hannibal says simply. He adds after a thought, “You know, if ‘Hannibal’ gets caught, my crimes will be yours.”

“Yeah, and if ‘Will’ gets caught, you’ll bring me with you. I’d lose both ways, is that what your saying?”

“No,” Hannibal says lightly. “If either of us are caught, I intend to make sure we both escape free.”

Will suddenly wants to break the deal off with Jack, because there is no way he can do this. The thought of escaping free with Hannibal tugs on his soul.

"I have something to confess,” Will says, sighing. Hannibal regards him curiously.

“I lost myself so many times over the years. I managed to lose myself with you, without a swap. I have found myself wondering what would happen if we did it. I suppose this is my doing. My secret wish. I think...that is why we aren't swapping back."

"It's not so bad," Hannibal smiles. Will knows beyond a reasonable doubt that Hannibal loves him, and it doesn’t even matter any more whether it’s platonic or not. Who in the world is just okay with a permanent body swap?

Hannibal pats his hands together and stands up. “Well, I still have quite a bit of work to do, and it seems we need to re-review the details of our schedule.”

The meeting with Jack goes better than expected. He doesn’t risk saying anything about Will’s old plans to betray Hannibal in front of ‘Hannibal’. To keep some amount of control over the meeting, Will tries to keep Jack and Hannibal from interacting much by doing most of the talking himself. Whenever Jack addresses Hannibal, Will butts in, much to Jack’s clear annoyance.

“Why was it necessary to bring the doctor?” Will barely hears him whisper to Hannibal on their way out, and Will does a 180 turn and says, “I heard ‘doctor’, is this about me?” Jack shut right up.

That night, they separate to each other’s homes to take on their different societal roles.

Chapter End Notes

Will is seriously thirsty AF in this fic.

Roles

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In the end, Will helps Hannibal finish cleaning up his house. They manage to haul everything from his basement and take it to the junkyard. Will couldn't believe there was even a bed down there among the torture tools, but he didn't comment. All of the weapons were removed from their odd hiding places, including a needle filled with some poisonous concoction hidden behind Leda and the Swan. Will was not able to talk Hannibal out of keeping the human cuts he kept in his freezer, and Hannibal was not going to risk Will throwing them out the moment he left, so they were going to Will's shed in Wolf Trap. They worked until the cleanliness of the house was up to Hannibal's standards.

Hannibal drives Will's car up to his house, piled up with the essentials he'd rather not live without; ice coolers with the meat and his favorite ingredients, silverware, stainless steel kitchenware, pots and pans, lint rollers for dog hair he stopped by the store to grab, his favorite pillow and blankets, expensive wine, and bathroom supplies.

One of his qualms with the switch is that none of his suits fit him anymore. He only has the one that he had fitted to Will's form at his favorite tailor's; he is their top customer, so thankfully they were able to fit him in very the morning that he called. The rest of his suits he handed over to Will, and it was safe to say his disappointment didn't last long. He was cheered to see that Will seemed genuinely interested in a few of them at least, and was already looking through them to find his favorites when he left.

The thing that Hannibal was not quite able to get over was having to forgo the harpsichord. Will told him it would be a bad idea if he backed a mover's truck up to his house, and "what if Jack looks in through my window again to see that the interior of my house looks just like yours?!" Hannibal couldn't argue with that; besides, this situation could not last long, probably not even a week, before people started growing curious enough to check out what's going on with them. They were only barely able to keep Alana away last time she called Hannibal.

Hannibal arrives at the Wolf Trap home, and when he opens the door, the dogs all poor out to greet him. He remembers the names that Will insists he memorize, and said each of them with a pat on the head of the corresponding dog. As they milled around him, he unloaded the car, starting with putting the meat in the freezer. After he was settled in, he teetered on the edge of straightening up a bit in the house, but felt it would be rude to Will if he didn't ask first, so he called him.

"Hello?" Will said into the phone, voice slightly worried. "What's wrong?"

"Just checking in to see how you felt about me living in your space."

"Well, considering this situation, and considering that I'm currently living in your space, it's fine."

"So it's okay with you if I make messes, or set my things in your cupboards?"

"You can clean my house if it makes you more comfortable, Hannibal," Will says, easily translating his meaning. "But, you know, anything too extreme that I wouldn't do, you shouldn't do. It's perfectly acceptable to me in that case."

“Understood. I wasn’t saying I wanted to clean your house though, it’s perfectly lovely, I just meant, living in general. Thank you for the allowances, Will.”

“Wait, Hannibal?”

“Yes?”

“I think maybe I wasn’t clear enough, or it could just be that you know exactly what I mean but I know you well enough that you will decipher anything I say as words parallel in meaning to their intended use in order to match them with your own wishes.” Will took a deep breath and continued. “When I say ‘too extreme’, I realize there are a lot of things that I might find to be too extreme, but that you wouldn’t. If any sort of uncertainty pops up about whether we would agree on the extremity of an action, just call me, please.”

“…Got it.”

“Wait. When I say ‘uncertainty’, what I mean is, because it doesn’t seem like you are an uncertain person at all, think of it as if I were there and I’m the one who’s feeling uncertain about doing something. You’d have already made up your mind. If you think I’d have any sort of issue with something you might be considering doing if I were standing right there, then call me ASAP. Please.”

The line is silent.

“Hannibal?”

“That’s a hard set of rules, Will. But I’ll do my best to abide by them.”

“Good. Thank you.”

He took Will up on that, calling him over the most insignificant, non-extreme things. Deliberately, Will thinks, gritting his teeth as the phone rings again.

“Yes, Hannibal?” Will answers.

“Do you use a toaster?”

“What?”

“Do you toast toast? Or anything else?”

“Sometimes? I have toast with coffee many mornings.”

“Oh. Nevermind then.”

“What were you going to say?”

“My apologies Will, it’s just that I can’t seem to find a brush for scrubbing out the toaster, and I was wondering if you’d bring mine to our therapy session tonight, that is, if you had no common use for it. But since you do….”

“Why don’t you just buy another one?”

“I don’t need two toasters, Will.”

“Right. I’ll bring it, alright? I’ll add it to the pile with the swan artwork, antler table décor, and not-too-dim-not-too-bright side table lamp. Please, from now on, only call from now on if it involves something that the common man might find gruesome.”

“There was a pretty gruesome pile of something I found on top of my slippers.”

“Buster is still working on his self-control. Maybe you and him can help each other out.”

After that, Will told him he could do do whatever the hell he wanted on his property, including murder and whatever else, and he would have no problem with it.

“Are you sure, Will?” Hannibal had said. “Technically, you’d be participating.”

Manipulative bastard, Will thinks as he hangs up.

When dinner finishes, Hannibal loads more than enough food for two into a pair of sealed containers that work excellently for retaining heat. Then he grabs a few bags of perishables, such as vegetables, snacks, and milk, and leaves for a couple of hours.

The dogs whine at his absence until he returns, and then they are happily wagging their tails again. However, to their collective dismay, he leaves again almost immediately to go to Will’s psychiatry appointment.

“Your stuff’s in the car,” Will says when Hannibal finds him waiting for him early in the waiting room.

Hannibal grins. “Thanks. How are you?”

“Oh, just trying to get used to finding my way around in this crazy world.”

“I can help you there. Come in.” They join each other in Hannibal’s office, where they talk about their day, and their appointment would be incomplete without some talk of a gruesome crime scene.

In the morning, Hannibal teaches Will’s class. He looks at Will’s lecture outline and smirks. Today, Hannibal gets to do show and tell. The kids begin to stream into the class, and he excitedly sets up the presentation while the last few stragglers find their seats as the clock hits seven. He puts on the first slide. “Today, we’re going to talk about the Chesapeake Ripper.”

When his class is over, the students curiously glancing at him, a couple even approaching him to ask him questions, Jack arrives, looking like a boulder moving against the current of bodies leaving the room. He has a curious expression on his face as well.

“Class went well today, I see,” he says. “Not very like you to speak one-on-one with your students, and even praise them for some of their answers, so I’ve heard?”

“Oh, well,” Hannibal said, trying to put on his best Will impression, and succeeding quite well at disguising the accent, he thinks. “They’re rather terrible, and I thought, why not lull them into a false sense of security?”

“Don’t go too far, Will. Speaking of which, how is your pursuit of the Chesapeake Ripper going?”

“Oh, the usual. Some days I think I have him, then he slips away. I’m just playing reel-the-fish, you know?”

“Yes. But, I thought we agreed that I was going to be the fisherman in this scenario, considering your unique position.”

“You are, of course,” Hannibal plays along. “Maybe you weren’t clear enough on our last visit.”

Jack just stares at him. “You feeling okay?”

“Migraine,” Hannibal says, remembering to avoid eye contact.

“He hasn’t gotten too far into your head, has he?”

Hannibal feels utterly gleeful, but replies calmly. “That’s ridiculous, Jack.”

“I don’t know, you’ve been acting different. I need to talk to you in private. Follow me to my office please.”

They enter Jack’s office and sit down, face to mask. Jack jumps straight to it. “Is there any particular reason you decided to bring Hannibal Lecter, the man you accuse of being the Chesapeake Ripper, with you to our little meeting the other day? You know the one, where we were going to talk about baiting and catching Hannibal?”

“I…” Hannibal genuinely pauses. He doesn’t find it that odd that Will would continue this pursuit of the Ripper in order to placate Jack, but has Will been insistent about it recently? As far as Hannibal knows, Will no longer has any interest in seeing Hannibal caught or killed.

“He’s my psychiatrist, and my friend,” he ends up saying. “Aren’t either of those two reasons good enough to have him along with me?”

Jack stares him dead in the eyes. “You told me he was the Ripper. You said, clear as day, that you were working on baiting him so we could both give him the justice he deserves. You were supposed to act as his friend, not actually become his friend. What has gotten into you, Will?”

Will’s first day as a psychiatrist is a little overwhelming for him. Hannibal hadn’t had time to show him how to prepare his hair, so he spends forever in the bathroom attempting to get it just right, and goes through a quarter bottle of hair product before saying “good enough”. He shaves, grabs one of the few suits and ties that aren’t paisley and plaid, and struggles into them. He prepared his coffee, and was constantly rifling, shuffling, dropping, and picking up the notes Hannibal gave him on his patients. Though he had gotten up two hours early, he was about to be late.

Hannibal would kill him if he found out, but he would just have to get fast food. He thinks that this would certainly constitute one of the ‘most extreme’ cases Hannibal would have him call about. He hurries out the door, a mint and bottle of mouthwash in his bag for him to use after eating, in the case that Hannibal would be lurking at the FBI building. After going through the drive thru and forcing himself to take a couple bites of a burger, he takes the mouthwash while driving and spits it out the window. Having become acclimated to Hannibal’s cooking, especially over the past few days, he tosses the remains of his burger that he could barely stomach into the trash when he parks. It’s no wonder Hannibal acts as though this kind of thing might actually be able to kill him.

Will arrives at Hannibal’s office, where he’d just been the night before with him, half an hour before the first patient‘s scheduled appointment. He checks his notes, takes some deep sighs, and slips himself into a calm and collected mindset as he takes his seat in Hannibal’s desk chair. He hears a knock and opens the door.

Will hates this job. He never like psychiatrists to begin with, and now he has to be one. There is the nice benefit of not having to share a single thing about himself, though. Just keep asking them how they feel about this or that, offer some common sense advice. He just wants to stop talking by the time the first appointment ends, but there are three more. The last one sure is something, and Will worries a couple times whether the guy would completely fly off the handle. He talks about himself in the third person and has dreams more disturbing than the ones Will has. Will is so ready to go home when his session is finally over. Maybe he’ll ask Hannibal if he purposely schedules the prone-to-violence patients at the end of the line of tired, normal, exhausted people, like a desert treat for himself. Will heads home, bypassing the fast food, and uses the rest of the cash he has in his wallet to get some fruits at a store.

Chapter End Notes

Who doesn't enjoy squabbling married-couple Hannigram?

The King and the Shadow

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Late some time in the middle of the night, at a time when everyone except the most persistent of night owls ought to be asleep, Will is awoken by a noise in the large house. He grabs the heavy flashlight beside his bed and creeps to his bedroom door and cracks it open to listen. The intruder knocked what sounded like an entire cupboard of glassware out onto the tile floor. Will wonders if it might be Hannibal, but wouldn't he have called before breaking into the house so noisily and rudely at night? Will grabs his phone and looks at the screen, but there are no messages.

Will cautiously goes down the steps, turns the corner into the kitchen, and drops his flashlight to his side at the sight that greets him. Hannibal is standing, perplexed, over the shattered remnants of the big chandelier. He notices Will, and looks up.

"So sorry, Will. I should have called first, but figured you'd be sleeping and didn't want to bother you again."

"S' fine." Will grumbles. "What's all this?"

"I forgot I left something behind."

"You needed it right now?"

"Well, I couldn't sleep."

"What did you leave behind? You're trying to take the chandelier? I said I didn't want my house transformed into yours. Too suspicious."

"I didn't forget the chandelier. It just fell. Besides, it wouldn't be suspicious to Jack."

"Hm," Will grunts. "Well, can you find what you need? I'm exhausted, and I'm going back to bed." Will stops and turns around. "What do you mean? Is Jack…."

"Jack is fine. He visited the class as I was finishing the lecture. Does he always shout at students?"

"Oh, uh, that's a personality trait of his," Will says. "What did he want?" His neck is prickling with cold sweat.

"Nothing, it turns out. He made some comments on the outlook of the students leaving the class, and my own behavior. I suppose I engaged with the students more than they're accustomed to, and didn't avoid eye contact enough. Jack showed suspicion in you, and by that I mean me. I was able to convince him that you were just having an off day, and faked a migraine."

"That's…wow. And then?" Will asked.

"He left."

"Good," Will says with relief. "I don't think either of us should have to deal with him so soon again, not in the states we're in. He never makes anything easy."

“He doesn’t, does he?” Hannibal’s voice has a faraway tone to it.

“So,” Will starts, awake now. “What are you looking for? I’ll help.”

Hannibal is so very much himself, even when wearing Will’s skin. It helps that while he doesn’t have his original voice, he does maintain his accent. His hair is even, his face is even more even, and his eyes are steady and unblinking.

“It might not be here,” he said.

“What?” Will sighs. “Come on, Hannibal, you just broke into your house and woke me up for something that might not be here? It must be pretty important.”

“It is, or maybe was, to me. I’m not sure how important it would have been to you, and you might have thrown it away.”

Will looks steadily at him. Is he speaking in metaphors now? Will wonders what he might have thrown away. Maybe Hannibal is offended that Will hasn’t been jumping around in excited joy in his new body like Hannibal seems to be doing. Maybe Hannibal was hoping Will would take more interest in his suits, or trying to learn how to part and identify the titles of all the different pieces in the orchestra music that assaults him everywhere he goes.

Hannibal is looking back, but something about him almost seems distraught. Will’s heart twinges despite all of their mismatched morals, and the countless odd and tiring problems Hannibal has been causing him in the last couple of days. When it comes to Will, all Hannibal really wants is companionship, and suddenly Will understands why he’s here.

Hannibal slowly holds his hand out to Will. “Will?”

Will reaches out almost immediately when Hannibal does, and touches the tips of their fingers together. They slide their hands together, palms flat, and then lace their fingers. Will looks from their locked hands back into Hannibal’s eyes, waiting.

“Will you hunt with me?” His face tells Will that now is the moment of truth.

Will could see that Hannibal was either changed, or he had basically not understood him at all. He never stood a chance against him, but he could say he fought well. This night could possibly end with at least one of their lives, Will thinks.

“You want to know whether I’ve chosen you or Jack.”

Hannibal looks like he might snap like a line. “My answer is you, Will. What’s yours?”

Will wants to hate him more than he loves him. If Hannibal wants the truth, he will have the whole entire truth.

“You know…” Will inhaled, “the ‘me’ that’s here now isn’t really ‘me’. Part of myself was lost when I shot Hobbs.”

“How do you mean? Everyone changes, Will. You are evolving.”

“Hmph. You didn’t know me before I started ‘evolving’, though, did you?”

“We are in a constant state of evolution. You wouldn’t say that the ‘you’ you were before Hobbs was the same as the child you used to be, would you?”

“It’s scary, not knowing who I really am. You took away all my knowledge of who I thought I was, and replaced it with uncertainty and fear.”

“Change is scary. Change is unknown, and humans since the very beginning have feared the unknown. But you know, the unknown isn’t always bad.”

“We fear the unknown because it may hold nothing in store for us except pain, loss, and death. The potential of the unknown is often times bad. What has my life been lately, that isn‘t pain, loss, and death? What have I to gain by embracing change?”

“Humans must strive for something better than what we have, become better than who we are. Otherwise, we are stuck in a joyless, mediocre existence that can’t be considered a life.”

“So, it is no concern of yours that I swapped with Hobbs as he died, and lost a piece of myself to the void? That is an acceptable kind of change?”

Hannibal, for once shocked into silence, regarded him with sorrow.

“That’s right. He didn’t just take a piece of me, though. I took a piece of him. The hallucinations. The stag man, I was seeing him. Maybe…that’s where my strong attachment to his daughter comes from. He loved her.” Will’s voice broke and he felt tears. “I love her.”

“Will, you are not lost!” Hannibal finally says. “Not to me.”

“I have a part of his soul filling the empty space where a part of my soul left.”

Will shut his eyes against the tears, and he felt tender arms wrapping themselves around him, holding him close to a warm body. He could smell his old aftershave on him, the one that Hannibal liked to complain about.

“Same old aftershave?” he mumbled into his shoulder. Hannibal stroked his back.

“You say you feel love for his- our daughter. It could be that the part you lost was the part that refused connections, and the part you gained was, ironically, a connection.”

Will wiped tears away, but his eyes were still hot. “As for the awful aftershave. A thing may lose its distastefulness after it becomes associated with delight. Or, in this case, a person who I love.”

“Hannibal…” Will embraces him back. “I want to run away with you. I want to.”

Hannibal caresses Will’s face as they stare into each other’s eyes. Will is just thinking how dissociating a kiss between them would feel, when Hannibal whispers into his ear. “It’s enough for you to want it. I have a surprise for you. For both of us.”

“A surprise, huh? Where is it?” He looks into Hannibal’s lion eyes.

“Hold on, why rush?” He brushes his lips over Will’s, and when Will presses forward, withdraws. “In regards to it. There is one thing I’d like to bring up. You mentioned seeing a stag man?”

“Well, yeah,” Will said impatiently. “It must have been some kind of hallucinogenic conglomerate of my first meeting with you.”

“The first meeting? Oh, you must mean when you deconstructed Cassie Boyle’s murder and saw the Copycat, the hidden face of yours truly.” The bastard smiled.

“Right. That.”

“A good surmise, I suppose, if a bit nonsensical.”

“And what, may I ask Doctor Lecter, would be your explanation for the appearance of said crazed hallucinations brought on by none other than yourself?”

“I don’t know, Will,” he said with mock innocence. “I think it would be in everybody’s best interest to warn you that a ‘stag man’ has indeed been wandering around.”

Will scoffed, mood totally breaking as they separate. “Oh, you’re trying to make more bad jokes now?”

“Bad? I’m only trying a little. Have you ever heard of the Algonquian Native American myth of the wendigo?”

Will jerked his head ‘no’, perturbed.

“A cannibalistic human turned demonic monster, a tale meant to deter family members from eating each other if suffering starvation. Can’t say that I was ever taught such a lesson, but I doubt anything would have changed if I were told.” Hannibal smiled again, dimples showing, and Will realized that there was so much more about this man that he wanted to get to know. He continued jovially, “well, they’re real.”

“Please, go on.”

“Our senses and abilities allow us to see a little bit beyond the human realm. I can see many otherworldly spirits, just as animals can. You must be able to glimpse shadows because your empathy is so great that it allows you to see the true forms of things.”

Finally Will, having resisted rolling his eyes for long enough, spoke up. “That is possibly one of the most ridiculous things you have tried to tell me so far.”

“Fine. See for yourself.” But he only continued to smile at Will.

Will looked around. “You’re telling me the stag man…wendigo, whatever…is here?”

Suddenly, a shadow falls over the floor in front of him, and Will gasps at the antlers that sprout from the humanoid shape. A teen girl’s voice speaks up from behind him, in the direction of the light source, and Will knows before looking that it is she who casts the shadow. “My father is dead, but his bloodline isn’t.”

Will recognizes that voice from his countless daydreams. He turns slowly on the spot. “Abigail?” he whispers.

“I overheard everything you said,” she explains, smiling up at him. “Hi, Dad.”

“Oh my god,” Will says, afraid to believe his eyes. “Abigail.”

Suddenly he lets loose a shout of joy and throws his arms wide open. “Abigail, I can’t believe it! You’re taller!” She giggles and bear hugs him, and they rock back and forth. “You barely look any different from before. You’re alright, you’ve been well?”

“It hasn’t been that long! You, on the other hand, look a lot more like a psychiatrist than before.”

Will finally releases her. “Right. It’s…unspeakably fantastic to see you again. But, if you don’t mind, I’d like to have a private word with him,” he jerks his thumb over his shoulder.

Sensing trouble, Abigail backed quickly out of the room, giving him a beaming smile, which he gladly returned, before disappearing around the corner.

His smile slips straight off his face.

“You!” Will leaps at Hannibal. “Damn you!”

Hannibal doesn’t bother trying to deflect his backhand. He barely flinches, and for that, Will full-on punches him in the face.

A bruise already begins forming on the side of Hannibal’s jaw as he straightens himself. “You deserved it!” Will says, poking his finger at his chest. Hannibal merely wipes a bit of blood trickling from the corner of his mouth and shrugs. As infuriating as literally everything is about him, Will suddenly finds him equally infatuating.

Anger fuels a swell of lust, and he jams their mouths together in a vicious kiss. “Yes,” Will says.

This man, no this creature, is King. It truly is a god, toying with lives, yes, but belonging on that high throne as naturally as an apex predator does. Will decides, at that moment, that he NEVER wants to see those eyes behind bars ever again. Even if it means seeing them in the world, among humans, like a natural disaster.

“I’ll hunt with you.”

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, Will could have swapped them back the entire time if he really wanted.

Thank you for reading! <3 I hope you enjoyed!

Feel free to let me know what you thought of this fic!

p.s. I miiight make a short Part 2...explicitly. :p (which I've never written before, but hey)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!